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Dear Sir

M1 Junctions 28 to 35a Maximum Mandatory Speed Limit: Consultation Document

We are writing with reference to the Consultation Document on the proposals to introduce a maximum mandatory speed limit to Junctions 28 to 35a of the M1 motorway. The Air Quality Committee of Environmental Protection UK has considered the consultation document and wishes to provide the comments as set out below. These comments represent an overview of the Committee, but do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of individual Environmental Protection UK members.

About Environmental Protection UK

Environmental Protection UK is a national charity that provides expert policy analysis and advice on air quality, land quality, waste and noise and their effects on people and communities in terms of a wide range of issues including public health, planning, transport, energy and climate.

We offer clear and critical analysis of UK government and European Union policy proposals through a range of high-quality publications and expert-led events, as well as up-to-date regulatory information through our comprehensive guide to UK and EU environment legislation.

Environmental Protection UK works with and for UK national and devolved governments, local authorities, business, academics and the general public, and with relevant EU institutions and NGOs.

Response to the Consultation.

In general terms, Environmental Protection UK welcomes the initiative that the Highways Agency is taking to improve air quality. However, we note that the proposals have received negative responses from some sections of the press. We feel that the Highways Agency could have presented the proposals from a different perspective, highlighting that improvements to air quality benefit public health as well as achieving statutory limit values set by the EU.

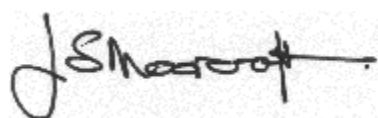
The detailed evidence to support the proposed speed reduction is not provided in the Consultation Document, but it is noted that the proposals will have the effect of “*managing traffic growth and thus the volume of traffic*” as well as “*reducing vehicle emissions as a consequence of setting the maximum speed limit below the national speed limit*”. It is thus not clear as to what extent the benefit arising from the proposed speed reduction is founded on an assumption that traffic volumes will be reduced, and how sensitive the outcome is to this assumption.

It is noted that the proposed mandatory speed limit will be reviewed to determine whether it is still needed as air quality improves, and that “*the proposed speed limit will be removed as soon as the background air quality improves sufficiently to enable this*”. The mechanism for this review process is not stated, but any decision to remove the speed limit will need to be very carefully considered. Defra, in its guidance to local authorities¹, states that “*the decision to revoke an Air Quality Management Area should recognise that pollutant concentrations can vary significantly from one year to the next, due to the influence of meteorological conditions*”, and that authorities “*need to be reasonably certain that any future exceedences (that might occur in more adverse meteorological conditions) are unlikely*”. Any decision to remove the speed limit will require a detailed assessment, which should be open to consultation.

The Consultation Document makes the assumption that the proposed reduction in the speed limit will be successful in achieving compliance with the EU limit values, but does not address what additional actions will be taken if levels continue to exceed the statutory levels. The Highways Agency should state clearly what actions it intends to take if the proposed speed reduction does not attain the predicted benefits.

Finally, the Highways Agency is requested to confirm when it intends to introduce similar speed restrictions on other sections of the road network for which it is responsible, where there are AQMAs directly associated with road traffic emissions.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Moorcroft
Chair of Air Quality Committee

¹ LAQM.TG(09)